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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0595
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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5295
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1618
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2006

In Today's Papers

Fire Breaks out in Istanbul's Main Airport
All papers: A large fire broke out in a cargo area of Istanbul's main Ataturk Airport on Wednesday, injuring three people. Papers say the blaze might have been caused by an electrical short circuit, but the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), an offshoot of the PKK, claimed responsibility. Authorities maintained there is no evidence to suggest sabotage. Yeni Safak claims the fire could be linked to alleged customs irregularities. Planes are landing and taking off on schedule after a brief disruption yesterday. Many companies experienced heavy material and financial losses in the blaze, which has forced the authorities to move Istanbul's commercial cargo operations to the small airport at nearby Corlu.

Erdogan on Council of State Attack, Turkish Economy, Elections

All papers: Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised speech to his AK Party group yesterday that last week's attack on the Council of State was aimed at disrupting stability and security in Turkey. 'The heinous armed attack at the Council of State is an open act of provocation. It is sad that some politicians have exploited it and refuse to see the true face of the murderer. We can defeat terrorism only by boosting freedoms and preserving human rights,' Erdogan said. Erdogan rejected suggestions that the AKP would take risks with the economy for political gain, saying there would be no irresponsible spending or tax cuts as part of a drive to win votes in next year's election. Concerns that the government might call an election ahead of schedule have contributed to strains in domestic financial markets, which have pushed the lira to its lowest level against the USD in over two years. Erdogan noted that market fluctuations are occurring around the world, and that the AKP government is not in a hurry to intervene. Erdogan stressed that there are no plans to call

early parliamentary elections, despite persistent speculation about such a move.

Turkey, Greece to Set Up Emergency Hotline
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report that following the collision of Greek and Turkish F-16 fighter jets over the Aegean Sea during a dogfight earlier this week, the two sides have decided to establish a direct phone line between the Turkish airbase in Eskisehir and the Greek base in Larissa for use in emergency situations. The direct line will be inaugurated on June 10, when Greek Foreign Minister Bakoyannis is scheduled to visit Turkey. The Turkish Air Force Command announced yesterday that the incident this week occurred when two Greek F-16 jetfighters approached a Turkish F-16 from the rear and rammed into it. The Turks blamed the Greek side for what they termed 'harassment.' Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis told the press that the collision and conditions in the Aegean would be taken into consideration in the context of Turkey's application to join the EU.
'Yesterday's accident must be a signal to Turkey to abandon tactics that do not tally with its European perspective,' Karamanlis said.

BTC Oil to Reach Turkish Port in Late May
Star and Yeni Safak report that the Azerbaijani crude oil that has been flushed into the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline will reach the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan on May 27 to be distributed to world markets. The BTC will carry an estimated 50 million ton of crude oil annually, resulting in 300 million USD of annual income for Turkey. Heads of

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state and government from 16 countries are expected to participate in the inauguration of BTC in Ceyhan on July 13. Prime Minister Erdogan told Secretary Rice during her April visit to Ankara that he would like to see the US President and Secretary of State at the inauguration, according to Yeni Safak.

Columnist Ibrahim Karagul wrote in the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak about BTC: "What is the connection between the air attacks in Afghanistan that killed hundreds of civilians and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline? Why is NATO getting ready for a ground operation in Afghanistan? Why is the UK deploying more troops in Afghanistan? Why are NATO and US forces bombing Afghan villages? BTC petrol will be transported from the port of Ceyhan with by oil tankers beginning on May 27. The official opening of the pipeline is being organized for July 13. There will be a glorious ceremony with the attendance of many heads of state. The US will be represented at a high level. There is no doubt that BTC is a very important step toward Turkey's goal of becoming an energy hub. But the project itself and the nature of the opening ceremony also show that BTC is also an indicator of a frightening polarization. Problems in the Middle East will spread to Central Asia in the near future. The main reason for the US interest in the opening of the BTC pipeline is that BTC is the only project the US had started in the Caspian region since the 1990s that has actually been completed. The US launched very expensive military operations to facilitate some other projects, but none of them was successful. Therefore, the US needs the BTC pipeline more than Turkey does. Now that BTC is completed, Washington is exerting great efforts for the completion of a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) natural gas pipeline. The US is trying to lure India into this project as well. And that is the main reason behind the renewed fighting in Afghanistan. NATO is launching a 'mop-up' operation to secure the pipeline route. In short, a dirty project is being carried out through the blood of poor, innocent Afghans. BTC is a great opportunity for Turkey, but is also an extension of frightening geopolitical plans for Eurasia."

Police Detain Members of Fundamentalist Terror Group in

Konya

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others: On Wednesday, anti-terror police captured 24 suspected members of the fundamentalist 'Islamist Great Eastern Raiders' Front (IBDA-C)' terrorist organization in the central Anatolian province of Konya. The suspects are said to have run dormitories for single men and cafes and restaurants in order to recruit members. Some of the suspects were reportedly cashing post-dated checks, and some were involved in kidnappings. Police seized three handguns and organizational documents.

UN Investigates Women Suicides in Southeast Turkey

Hurriyet reports the United Nations has sent a representative to Turkey to investigate the sharp rise in suicides by women in the mainly Kurdish southeastern city of Batman. There are suspicions that the increase in suicides has been caused by heavy penalties brought by the new penal code for honor killings, and that most of the suicide victims have been forced to kill themselves by their families. The number of suicides reported in Batman in the last five months is higher than the number of suicides committed throughout 2005.

Editorial Comment

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What does Russia Think about Turkey?

Hakan Aksay commented in the leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet (5/25): "An effort to improve Turkish-Russian relations has been a marked feature of Putin's rule. Tension between these two countries might benefit others, but would inevitably damage both countries. Turkey's geo-strategic position is based on energy resources. Both Turkey and Russia have joint interests in the Black-Sea. Russian Gazprom wants to do business in Turkey. If Russia offers Turkey an energy partnership in the near future, that would not be a surprise. It is noticeable that Russia is also showering Turkey with proposals ranging from the sale of military helicopters to the construction of nuclear power plants. The recent improvement in Russia-Turkey relations disturbs the US. The US is pressuring Turkey not to have trade cooperation with Russia. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov will be coming to Turkey on May 31. President Sezer's visit to Russia will follow soon after that. Turkish-Russian relations could accelerate quickly if US pressure can be avoided."

TV Highlights
NTV, 8.00 a.m.

Domestic News

- Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni will travel to Ankara for a three-day official visit on Sunday to meet with Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul.

- Turkey's social security reform bill, which had earlier been vetoed by President Sezer, will be discussed by the parliament next week.

International News

- British daily The Independent said Ankara's EU bid has been jeopardized by the killing of a top judge by an Islamist lawyer last week. The angry popular response to the murder motivated by disagreements over the right to wear the headscarf has had the effect of forcing people in Turkey to take sides.

- President Ahmadinejad said the US will fail in its effort to provoke ethnic clashes in Iran. The statement came a day after Iran closed a state-owned newspaper and detained its

chief editor for publishing an insulting cartoon that sparked riots by ethnic Azeris in Tabriz in northwestern Iran.

- UNSYG Annan plans to send his special envoy, Michael Moller, to Cyprus, Turkey and Greece to test the ground for a new UN peace initiative on Cyprus.

- Nabil Hodhod, a Gaza security chief loyal to President Abbas, was killed in a car bomb attack yesterday.

Economy News

- Turkey's telecommunications board and Vodafone Group Plc have signed a concession contract to complete the sale of Telsim, Turkey's second-biggest mobile operator. Earlier this month, Turkey's top administrative court approved Vodafone's 4.55 billion USD takeover of Telsim.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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